

6 (ISLA)(NDS) ZINE



ISSUE I

LANGUAGE

2019

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Hey readers and fellow zinesters!

First of all, thank you so much for taking the time to read the first issue of the 6 (ISLA)(NDS) zine. As the editors we are very excited to have finalized the 'Language' edition — our first issue — and to be able to share it with you.

As we have mentioned before, we are only the editors of the zine but 6 (ISLA)(NDS) is a collaborative project meaning, we can't do this without your submissions. So we want to give a special thank you to everyone who sent in a submission and chose to share their experiences with us as well as with everyone that will read the zine.

The goal of this issue is to share experiences of how language(s) have shaped us within the context of the 6 (ISLA)(NDS) mission statement. As a collective we would want to mobilize the thought of dismantling on-going systems of oppression and to build a movement around 6 (ISLA)(NDS) – with the zine as a means of archiving our collective and/or individual stories of decolonization.

We hope that you find encouragement, mutual anger, laughter or that you can relate to the submissions.

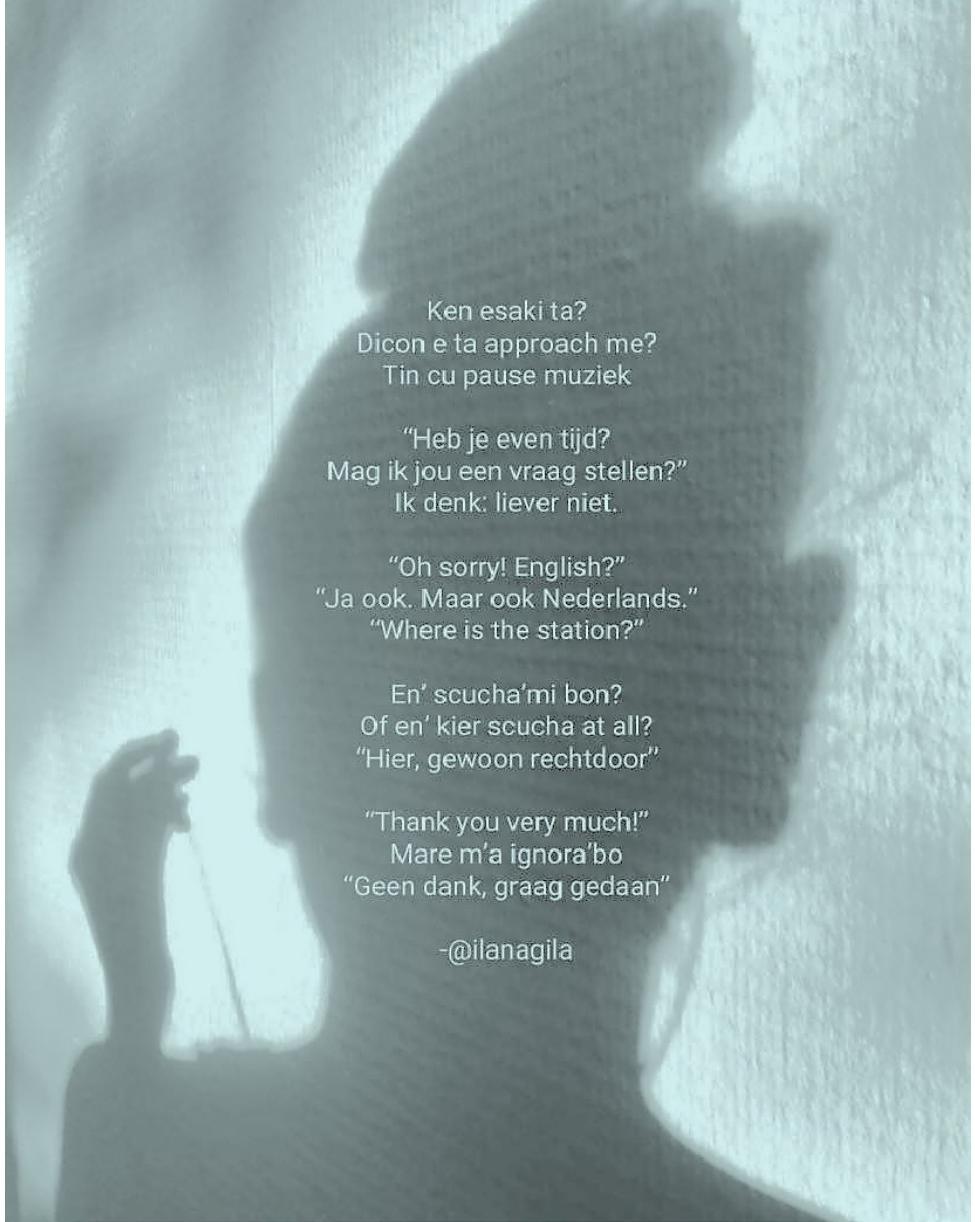
- Pahola, Alexine & Ichmarah

Mission Statement

6 (ISLA)(NDS): Aruba, Boneiru, Kòrsou, Saba, Statia, St. Maarten

We are 3 (Black) Women of Color from the islands living in the Netherlands. With this zine we want to show experiences of Black and People of Color that are either born/raised/descendant from these 6 islands in the Caribbean. These islands were all – still are to a certain degree? – Dutch colonies, and this has left traces in our cultures and in our identity.

As a result of the past we have similar experiences and therefore we want to explore our collective and individual identities. We want to do this through venting, poems, personal or short stories, paintings, photography, research or any other form of expression in whatever way that feels comfortable – or not? – with the goal of decolonizing the mind.



Ken esaki ta?
Dicon e ta approach me?
Tin cu pause muziek

“Heb je even tijd?
Mag ik jou een vraag stellen?”
Ik denk: liever niet.

“Oh sorry! English?”
“Ja ook. Maar ook Nederlands.”
“Where is the station?”

En’ scucha’mi bon?
Of en’ kier scucha at all?
“Hier, gewoon rechtdoor”

“Thank you very much!”
Mare m'a ignora'bo
“Geen dank, graag gedaan”

-@ilanagila

Rant 7

18-12-18
I grew up only partially knowing the legacy of my native tongue. "It's a mix of Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch" is what most of us answer to curious questions. Not aware that in this seemingly neutral/simple/naive sentence I acknowledge they ~~are~~ who have owned this little precious piece of land while simultaneously neglecting my West African ancestors.

but how do you acknowledge 'they who have been strategically erased' if erased but always ever present) my native tongue might just be the queen of all creole languages bringing together 400 years of violence/pain/joy/resistance my pride and honor. my little bubble.

If I am completely honest, it really took me some time to love my native tongue. I had to unlearn a lot of my own prejudices. I remember hating the Qing of our tongues.

Rant 8
You would never catch me in Facade singing "Mi no pox wanta mas..... I was better than that. I watched American TV. ei presentations + Anti-black as fuck. 16 yr old striving for whiteness. I should have seen my hair. Yall esnen ku o bai PSC ente 2008 i 2014 (pa esnen a lagami kana konk asini). I liked my blackness and that took (takes) I work to restore.

Tatin momentu nan di klaridat si. Tatin vividly remember expressing my frustrations in class about having to understand the dutch ^(any other native) exam. Fleur very arrogantly dismissed my arguments and everyone assumed I was just too dumb to be taking physics. I truly did not understand the privilege of being able to get an education in the same language they spoke at home. Bosa kenari a poder idioma tin?? osini ta parti di e "strategic erasure" ma papia di ofe den lemento.

-1-

(c)

Papiamentu is the only language that roles
of my tongue effect less. You see
speaking has never been easy. I speak
won't be long before they diagnose
me with a speech impairment.

Adding colonial languages to the mix
early on didn't help. Every time I speak
Dutch I feel my tongue getting tired.
I constantly have to translate myself
I go back and forth in mind of
3 languages any time I speak.
Mi kabes ta na ranci di esplosta tol dia
Because of this I have swallowed
my words for years.
But...
mi fada di sera mi boka. Mi fada di ta
sumiso.

The truth is though I am going to have
to keep swallowing my words + killing
my tongue (my eyes roll simultaneously)
in order to survive in this world
regardless of where I am and solely based
on what I look like and what I sound like

but as I am writing this pretentious
rant (in English no less), the black
woman behind me just stood up for
some carcasity (as per
herself against the lord (lol))
and I thank the usual) and I took the
usual) this pen + paper.

- kisses from a tired black girl. ▶
- kisses from a tired black girl. ▶

mi fada di sera mi boka. Mi fada di ta
sumiso.

side note of thoughts
Boso tbt sa ku e palabra
holo ta bin loi
OH Lord! ?

A mi temper a kere e a
bin foie rende Kristian
ku no kick a bira
Hodie

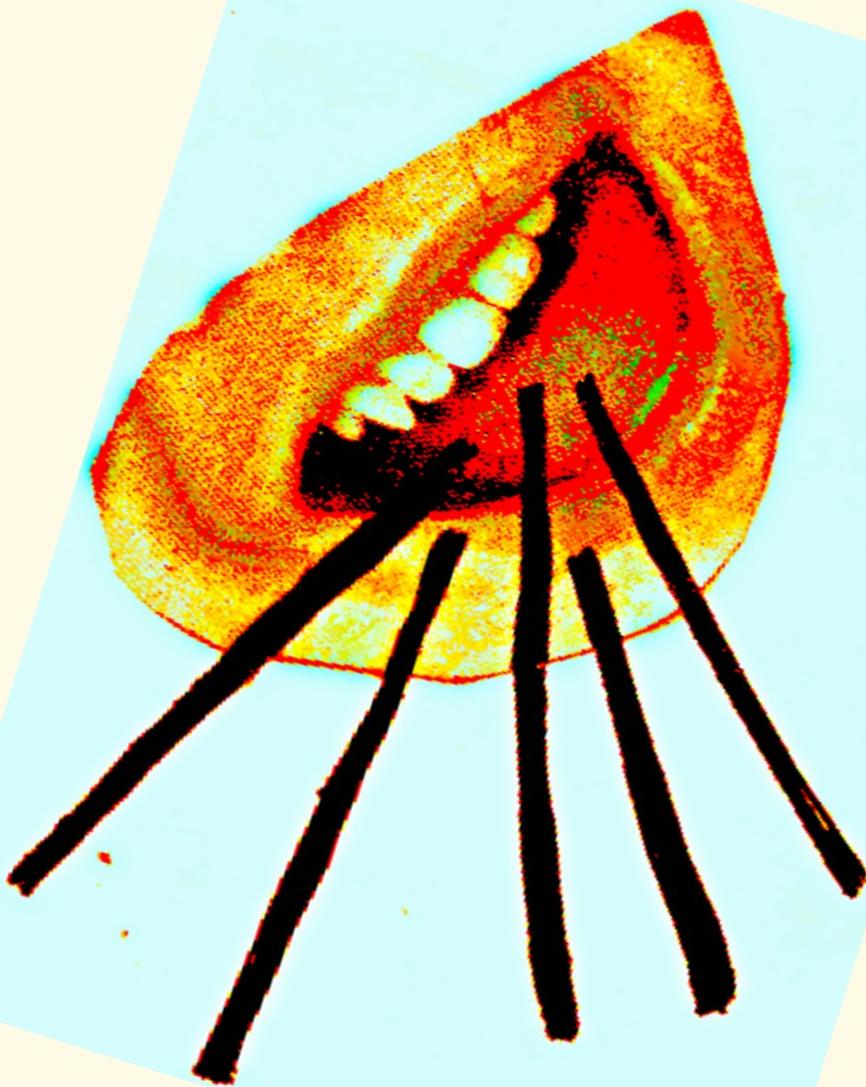
The (participation) system



"School in America was easy, assignments sent in by e-mail, classrooms air-conditioned, professors willing to give make-up tests. But she was uncomfortable with what the professors called 'participation' and did not see why it should be part of the final grade; it merely made students talk and talk, class time wasted on *obvious* words, hollow words, sometimes meaningless words. It had to be that Americans were taught, from elementary school, to always say something in class, no matter what. And so, *she sat stiff-tongued*, surrounded by students who were all folded easily on their seats, all flush with knowledge, not of the subject of the classes, but of how to be in the classes. They never said, "I don't know." They said, instead, "I'm not sure," which did not give any information but still suggested the possibility of knowledge."

from "Americanah" (English edition) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Issue 01



This passage strangely yet quite accurately resonated with my experience as a Curaçaoan girl that came to the Netherlands to do her studies. Strange, because I didn't expect the thoughts and feelings of the character Ifemelu – a girl from Nigeria who moved to the United States to pursue her studies – to represent my own so well. After all, all we had in common was the fact that we were both women of color that moved to a Western country at a young age to get a diploma. However, much like Ifemelu, I felt discomforted with the way the concept of grading for participation was applied in the Netherlands. Although participation was part of kindergarten, primary and secondary school on Curaçao, the way I experienced this grading system changed dramatically during university in the Netherlands. During most, if not all master courses, we were graded for participation. If it

didn't account for approximately 10 to 15% of our end grade, the requirement to participate in class was still pervasively present, as we were always reminded and awarded with bonus points, compliments or otherwise when we "gave our opinion" or "said something" during class.

At first, I thought it only logical for this skill to be part of the university education, and I still do. The natural evolution from primary, secondary to higher education is to shift from showing your understanding of complex material through written examinations and prepared presentations, to reproducing complex material by participating in discussions where you voice your opinion in a clear and concise way. However, much like Ifemelu, I often sat stiff-tongued with a feeling of discomfort between my peers. With the help of this passage, self-reflection and

hindsight, I untangled this discomfort into bits of understanding of the dynamics between the Dutch academic environment and myself. In sharing this story, I hope it resonates with others to help us all tackle this discomfort and empower ourselves.

“I was raised to know my turn to speak...”

Unlike Ifemelu, I not so much questioned the level of knowledge of my (often) Dutch and white peers, but I was astounded at how quick they dared to say something, *anything*. Regardless of the professor or expert that was standing in front of them, they felt comfortable in showing the little knowledge they had on a subject, completely unafraid of accidentally sounding unintelligent. It was a type of confidence I did not feel myself.

This lack made me think two, three or even ten times before fixing my mouth to let out any sound. I would proceed to tell myself, “But everybody is here to learn and so are you”. Isn’t that what getting an education is all about? Learning things that you do not know. Surely you have to say ignorant things to learn not to be? Even upon realizing and acknowledging this to myself, my feeling of discomfort strangely escalated to a crippling pressure in class.

Upon reflecting my difficulty with this participation system and the seeming lack of difficulty that others had, I started asking myself more questions. Much like Ifemelu, I wondered if the Dutch trained to speak their mind *freely* from elementary school and even outside school, like at home and with their parents. I started consciously registering and remembering the vision of parents asking their children during my commute, in the

supermarkets, or elsewhere, "What do you think about ...?" (truly anything). I contrasted that with what I remembered at that moment as my own experience. I was raised to know my turn to speak, and was made aware that there was a time and place for my opinion, and to speak carefully, mindful of who I was speaking to. "Awòki bo tin ku keda ketu un ratu. Tin otro hende ta papia." Although I knew this might not be the exact same experience for every Caribbeaner, I challenged myself to think outside the memory of my own childhood. Video fragments of Curaçaoan children interviewed on some popular TV shows passed through my mind. Adult interviewers would pick one kid from a group after doing some fun activity (playing games or sports at the park, swimming at the beach, bowling, whatever). They would ask them their opinion about the day and gently put the microphone near

their mouth indicating their turn to speak. Very shyly and sweetly, these children would reply with "Great, ma'am. Thank you". The minimum amount of space they took, I thought was endearing.

"... and the confidence I so much admired in my peers turned to slight disgust."

However, the moment I started having relating these shy interviewed children to myself as a university student, the endearment I felt turned into worry and criticism. I contrasted this with similar TV show fragments I saw of Dutch children, and how they were loud, opinionated and the carefree confidence they exuded. Doubt started wallowing over me. Was this the correct way for children to

behave and be raised? Is what I've learned wrong? Was my upbringing bad? Does this explain why I am now having this difficulty to speak up?

Although these thoughts almost became crystalized as explanations to why I'm quieter than others in class, one day something changed. During one of my final courses at the university, participation accounted for more than it ever has towards the end grade, and the confidence I so much admired in my peers turned to slight disgust. Students were competing with one another aggressively, talking over each other, sometimes saying the hollowest of words, just to have their grades met – it was all about me, me, and me.

For years, I conveniently tried to forget the countless moments of Dutch and white students around me voice so proudly, and with little knowledge, experience or expertise, their

opinions and generalizations about societal matters, including those of refugees, people of color and immigrants, much like myself. Hearing white people say the N-word around or even towards me in a playful way, boasting at the seams with the pride in not seeing a problem with *Zwarte Piet*, and bluntly asking stereotypical questions about my island. I then realized the following: my 'incompetence' for not speaking up as frequently as my peers was not because "I didn't have the right upbringing or education". These ignorant remarks I conveniently tried to forget to protect myself and move forward, made their way into my subconscious. As a Caribbean woman, I could not just 'participate' in class. I could not just say whatever to say whatever and voice my opinion as it occurred in my mind. If in the terror of saying anything remotely unintelligent, will that then lead to the confirmation of

the negative stereotypes I was made aware of all the time? My behavior almost became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Not wanting to sound 'stupid' meant I would not say much in a system where those who speak are rewarded and are seen as more intelligent. Was I coming over uninterested, and perhaps even *lazy*? Lazy? Someone who was always present, but just silenced by this anxiety?

At this point, the pride I feel for my island, the memories of the extremely *intelligent*, funny, creative and amazing Caribbean human beings that I have known and know today have strengthened. And the doubt in the Caribbean upbringing I had before? It turned into my strength. I sure as hell do not want to promote 'me, me, me' behavior in my own children (if I have any in the future) and I sure as hell will mindfully, carefully, respectfully, in a non-damaging way, tell my child to shut the fuck up

sometimes. This reflection led to some simple insights that I want to share with you. Do with it as you may:

There's nothing wrong with (occasional) silence.
Silence doesn't mean that you are dumb. Or shy. Or uninterested.
There's power in taking your time to listen and understand.
'I don't know' is an answer.
There's humility and even wisdom in the words 'I don't know'.
Say something or don't say something.
You choose what. You choose when. You choose how.
Basically, speak up, when you feel is your time to speak up.
Do you.

- Anonymous

DUTCH

X

REMOVE
COMFORT

X

LIKE A
Zwarte

X

help!

an

ETERNAL

X

NOOIT!

blij

X

serious
moments

white

always
COLD

X

Personal
trap

Whispers

X

Extra
WORK

X

Superieure

poep

X

LONELY



TRASH

X

I AM A DIFFERENT PERSON
in DUTCH and I fucking HATE it.

SPANISH

GOOD
MUSIC

IT'S TIME TO
SAY IT WITH
LOVE

FAMILY
COMFORT

MUCHO MÁS

Natural

MUSTHAVE
Heart

Plenty
LOVE

CELEBRATE

things

characterized by love +
comfort (but not fully comfortable)

GOOD
Tempo®

Papiamento

Papiamento



OUR
PRODUCT
MIX

CLASSIC
CRIANZA'

culture +
Tradition +
HISTORY

alarm!

CAN'T READ!
CAN'T WRITE!

grammar? spelling?
syntax? construction?

MUST

not!
Easy

Guess ALMOST
EVERYTHING

ENGLISH

BUT

English

WITH A TWIST

I feel

EXTRA
Smart

BE
Comfortable

gimme
more!
+
more!

GOLD
Negro

I have
Plenty
Good
DAYss

Black
Snack

deal!

ISSA

deal

characterized
by!
FUN! + laughter

THE MIX

③ that makes
me feel

Super Smart

+
quite comfortable

HAPPY
PERFECT

ELEGANCE
TIMELESS

SHINE BRIGHT
MY HEART
is finally
comfortable

Beyond!
Active

I am
complex
+ Simple

SPECIAL
SPECIAL
Blends

④

I make
PERFECT
Sense
(well, most of the
time)

I feel →

wonderful

but also conflicted.....

- Anonymous

①!

watch

CHANGE. bitch,

like an internal
REVOLUTION

that

UNCHAINS
HER !!

Personal
Party

FULL
MATCH

Fresh
MIX

DIAMOND
finish

⑤.....

YOU CAN. ?

INSPIRE
CAN you though?
CAN I though?

SWEET
win ? is it ~~colonial~~
though?
aren't all of these
languages colonial
in nature?????

LENGUAHE...

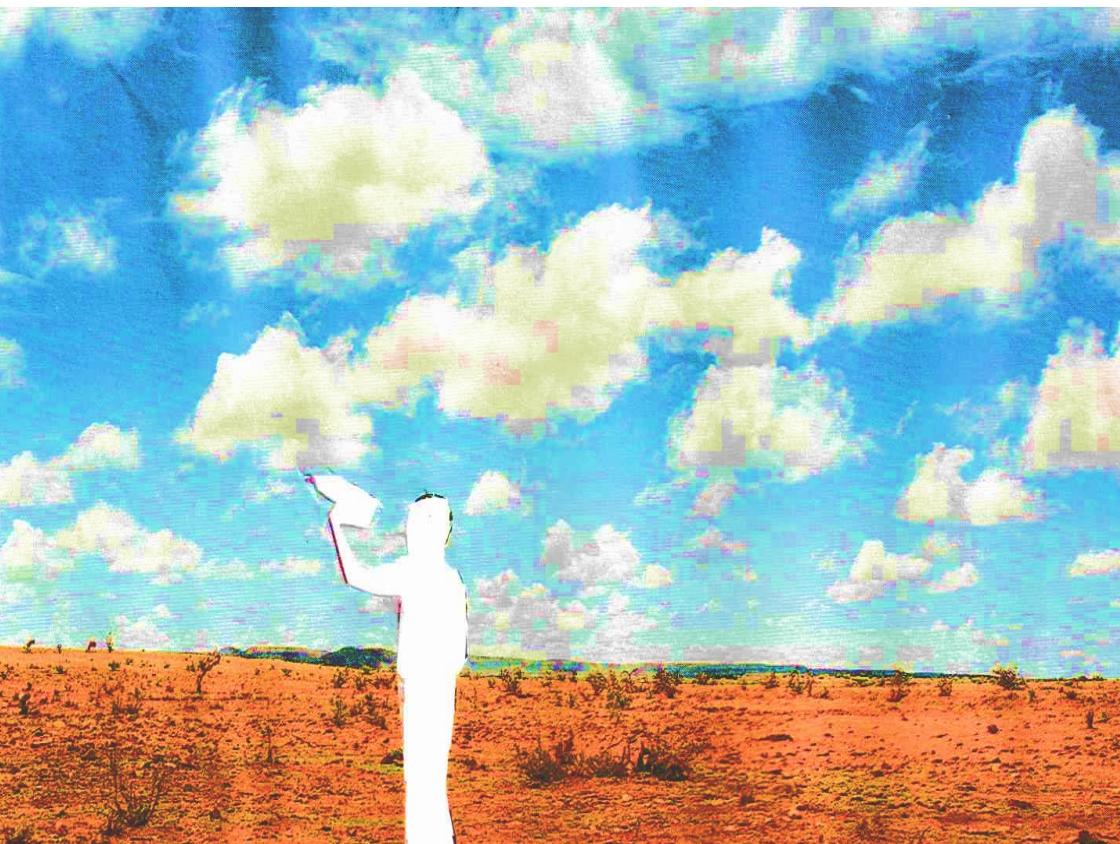
LANGUAGE...oops,
LANGUAGE

...LENGUAJE

UGH...STAALE...

ICH MARAH

The trauma of imposed Dutch language on our island school children



I submit this essay with the hopes that I'm not alone in feeling somewhat traumatized due to having had the colonizer's language imposed on me. I school children, particularly those that come from primarily Papiamento/Papiamentu and Spanish speaking homes, undergo due to the language of our islands' shared educational system, Dutch. The damage it does to their trust in their own capabilities as individuals. Now Dutch has never felt my own. It has felt miles and miles away from my reality. As a lower middle class person (i.e., low income), coming from a long line of people whom haven't had the privilege of amassing college or university degrees in the Netherlands, being forced to learn everything in Dutch has been a true challenge for me. In contrast to my issues with this language, I have come to embrace English language as a sort of bridge, a path to the world out there. A way I could come to express myself to many others.

I am not saying this system of embracing a foreign language isn't without its faults (i.e., linguistic imperialism), but that's a discussion for another time. Make no mistake, no matter how educated I feel I am, no matter how many hours I spend reading dense and very 'intellectual' texts in other languages, Papiamento will always be my mother tongue. When I feel frustrated, excited, loved, or angry, Papiamento is just automatically waiting there for me. There, for me to reach deep down and grab, especially our curse words or our words denoting adoration for someone.

I truly value Papiamento even if I never had the pleasure or privilege of undergoing any Papiamento lessons in school. Our Eurocentric values has caused that generations upon generations of people never learned to write their own native tongue. Papiamento will always provide me the words and perspective I need. It is the language that keeps me grounded. While I don't feel as

“As a young girl I’ve found it a great challenge to feel comfortable at school due to the language imposed on me.”

though I have the vast vocabulary and knowledge of adages my elders do, it is the language that most clearly comes to depict how bizarre this life feels for me most of the time.

As a young girl I’ve found it a great challenge to feel comfortable at school due to the language imposed on me. Year after year I’ve felt quite dumb and less than my peers because of it, I could never really express myself in class discussions because I did not feel confident enough to even speak. I was always considered the quiet kid, I had this immense and lively inner world that I could not share in class. Because of this I was always overlooked by teachers, this meant many of my struggles went unrecognized. This is a disservice for any child and all

the potential they all have within them.

In the mid to late nineties most of my elementary teachers were young adults coming from the Netherlands. These were some tall people all of European heritage that came to stand in front of groups of mostly brown children, children of color who mostly came from working class homes that didn’t speak Dutch at all at home or with other family members. The vast difference in culture, meant that they quickly grew frustrated with us. We couldn’t relate to these people, and these people couldn’t put themselves in our little shoes either. So some resentment grew, and kids being kids ended up doing kid stuff. I remember a group of children catching a ton of crickets outside and placing them all into a teacher’s desk drawer. Once he opened the

*“A small part of me is still a bit
insecure and doubts the totality of my
intelligence just because I’m not able to
speak Dutch like the natives can.
However, I do know that it’s a symptom
of our colonial past...”*

drawer and tons of insects jumped out we had a good laugh, the guy did have a sense of humor about it though.

While I've had plenty of European teachers (and local ones too obviously) I've admired during the key developing years, I've encountered those ready to tear down every last bit of confidence any of us in class had in regards to even daring to speak Dutch. One high school teacher made it clear what he thought of us. To this day, more than 10 years later, I still remember how he broke the last bit of confidence a classmate had. She had just given a presentation in front of class and when it came time to receive some 'constructive' feedback,

dude basically told the poor girl that she spoke Dutch like an elementary student. He continued by suggesting that even if we were to graduate high school and attempt our hand at college that we were more than likely to fail. The assumption being that we, as Arubans, will never be able to get anywhere in our academic career without this language. He explained that we would go to the Netherlands, fail and *that would be that*. In rough terms he basically said "*ya'll aint shit and will never be shit*". It was gross arrogance on his part and an underestimation of many of our people's ingenuity and will to thrive (with or without a formal education).

So it is a small step forward when schools and even our local Aruban government recognizes the necessity of tackling the discrepancy we have with language in our educational system. I do recognize how fortunate I am to have grown up in a time where we didn't receive corporal punishment at school because some assholes felt that it was somehow inappropriate for small children to speak their native tongue in class. Or even on the schoolyard for that matter. I am glad to say that throughout the decades a small shift has come in our thinking.

A small part of me is still a bit insecure and doubts the totality of my intelligence just because I'm not able to speak Dutch like the natives can. However, I do know that it's a symptom of our colonial past that I haven't been able to escape just yet. I am hoping children today grow to know how important it is to keep this in mind. Measuring all of your intelligence based on your domination of the colonizer's language does a

great disservice to all your other precious talents.

To conclude, I for one believe in embracing our diversity, we don't have to all speak the same language or even all have to be educated in the same manner. Do not be discouraged if you've been failed by the system. It was not constructed with us in mind, it was violently imposed on to us, it was beat into our descendants.

So keep fighting and keep learning, carve your own path. We have so much to offer our Island Communities.

– Mandy Laclé, Aruban Feminist

Mandy Laclé as an academic has always based her writing and research decisions from her own personal experiences. The main goal of her work has always been to contribute to more open discussions, awareness and encourage action(s) to be taken. Instagram: @caribe_x

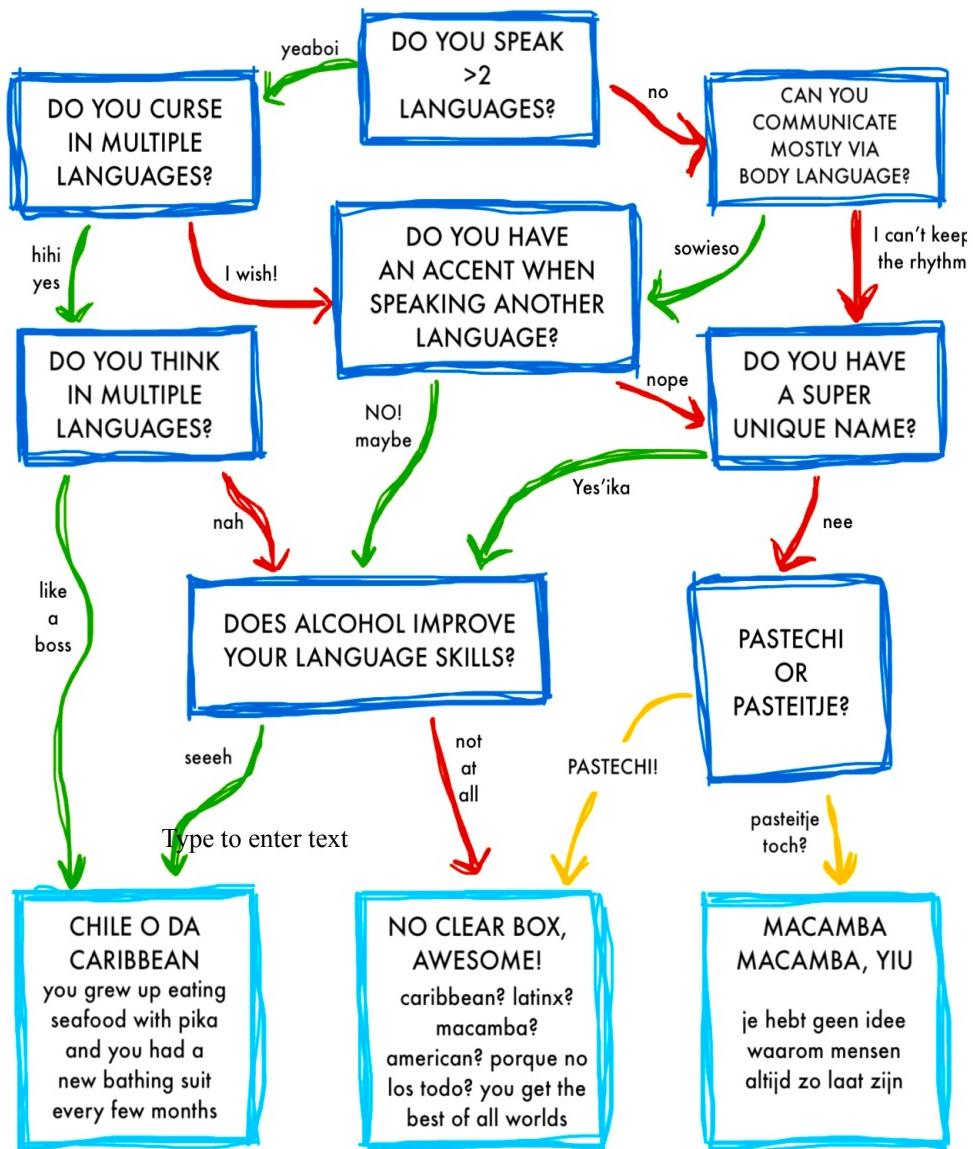


Mixed
my mother tongue
is mixed,
my own blood
is mixed,
of course
I always search
for whatever
I am not;
a Turkish tongue,
a Moroccan mouth,
a soft Syrian soul
for a taste,
for a taste
on my lips.

– Lily Clarisa



Lily Clarisa self-published her first poetry book, *Lost Love Poems*, in 2015, is also a performer of the arts, reciting her poems at events on Aruba and Curaçao. You can follow Lily Clarisa on Facebook @LilyClarisaWriter or Instagram @lilyclarisawriter



MotU
- Amber, Shari, Nagila

"Where are you from?"
"The Caribbean"
"Where in the Caribbean?"
"St. Lucia"
"What's it near??"
"Martinique..St Vincent."
"Huh??"
"Jamaica, I'm from Jamaica. I live in a hut by the beach. I eat jerk chicken for breakfast. My father is Bob Marley. Ya Mon! Rastafari! Selassie I!"

Issue 01



Angie Ignacio

...

Ugh! Almost a similar conversation here in the Netherlands except it goes a little bit like this:

Them: "So, where are you originally from? I can hear from your accent that you are not from here..."

Doesn't even give me enough time to respond

Them: "Are you from Africa?"

(*Or on a few occasions, they do let me respond*

Me: "I am from Saba."

Them: Oh, is that somewhere in Africa?"

I am practically eye rolling myself to thy kingdom come 😞. But I still respond.

Me: "No, I am from Saba, the Dutch Antilles."

Them: "Where is that? Is it close to Curacao?"

Mind you, that Saba is a Dutch island and is a part of the Dutch flag/ kingdom and some Dutch people know nothing of us. While we have to learn many things about them. 😞

Me: "No, it is an island near the island of St. Maarten. You know St. Maarten, right?"

Them: "Oh, St. Maarten!!! Yes, I know St. Maarten! It is a beautiful island and it has nice weather there, right?!"

Me: "Yeah I guess... 😞 😞"

Them: "Then, why would you come to a cold place like the Netherlands when you have such good weather over there and nice beaches? Life must be so good there.." etc.

In my mind: we also have hurricanes, sometimes tornadoes and thunderstorms. Still wanna come? 😊

Me: "I came here to study"

Them: "Oh that is nice. I also see that you speak English. Does Saba not speak Dutch even though it is part of the Dutch Kingdom? Why don't you all speak (fluent) Dutch?"

Me: "Why didn't you know about Saba? 😢"

Them: "... 😞 😞 😞"

Me: "😊"

Follow Angie on her website where she shares her poetry and other stories:

<https://angiesinspiration.com/>



Alexine Gabriela

•••

Deadass got asked at work today if I am "helemaal Nederlands" or "Antilliaan" (?). She really needed to ask because she couldn't tell from my accent (when I speak Dutch). the levels of ignorance

Edrieënna Brandao

•••



Edrieënna Brandao was 🎉 celebrating
being multilingual!

•••

Me: Wat is de functie van de wortelharen?

Student: de functie? het functie!

Me: [sigh] Wat is HET functie van de wortelharen?

Student: Ja... dat weet ik niet.

Me: Ahh if only the test next week was about arbitrarily assigned Dutch articles.

Student: Wat?

Me: Wat is HET functie van de wortelharen?

Apparently, I'm the most exotic person you've ever met

I am the question 'what are you mixed of?'

I speak a bit of four languages, none perfectly.

I am confused about my country's heritage.

I am a constant inquiry into the specifics of my ancestors, my language, how, what, when, where, and why the fuck.

I am not knowing where to even start that self-reflection.

I am a child, made to read the colonizer's language, made to study seasons and god, learning the word for boots before chancleta.

I am last names that refer to me as property.

I am the dark scars left over from colonization.

I am the beating received by my father for speaking Papiamento on school grounds in his homeland.

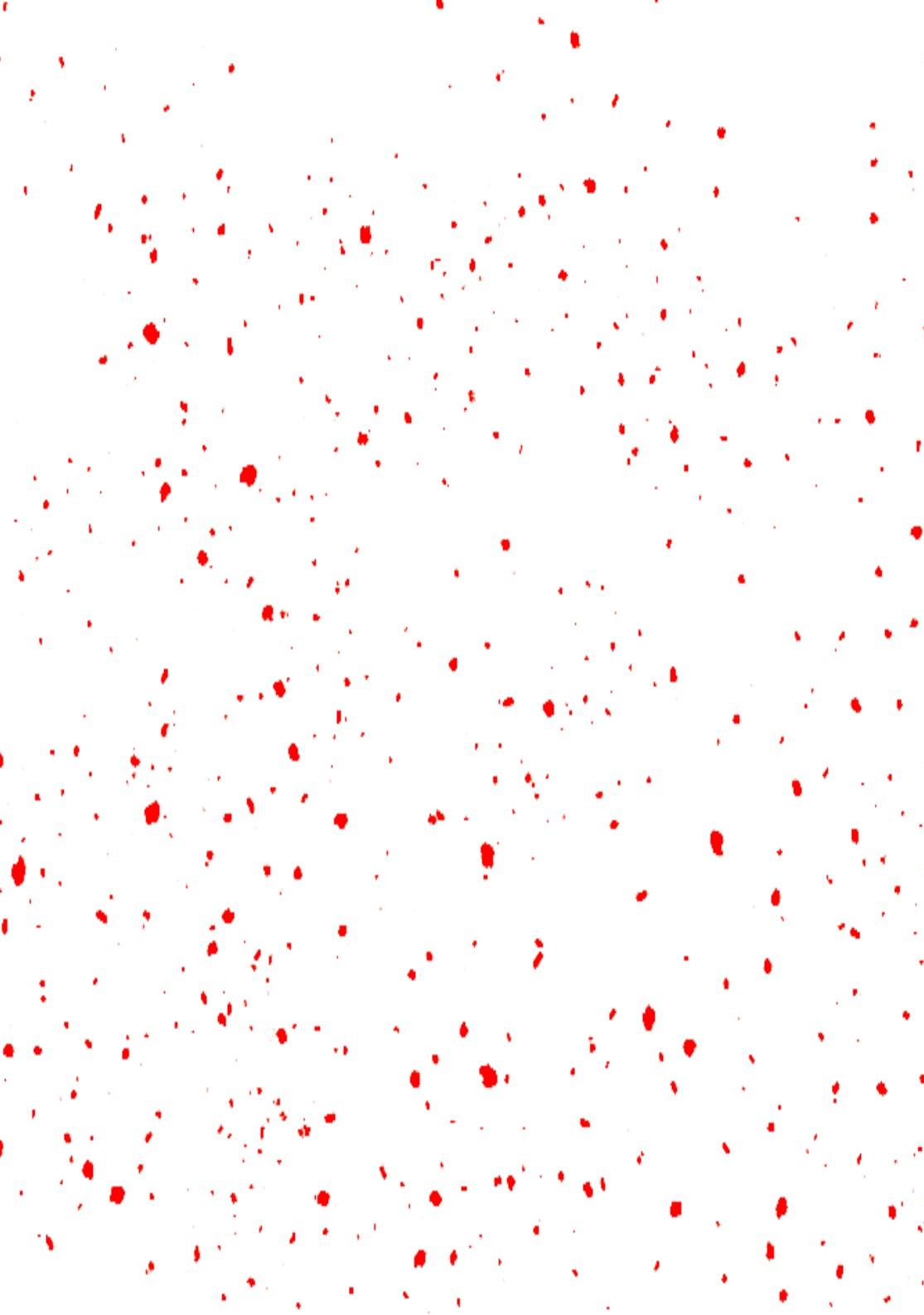
I am his alienation in a European country that defines itself through opposing that which he can never not embody.

I am his deteriorated mental health as a direct result.

I am the heaviness he carried with him to his deathbed.

I am the blood of his enslaved grandmother.

I am the sweat drenched in the soil of a slave run plantation economy.



I am rocks thrown at me by white boys while I waited at the
bus stop in a Southern Dutch Wilders town.

I am the tears cried by my friend for being bullied by her
professors for being short and brown.

I am the friend that has to explain Dutch racism to white
Dutch people.

I am anxiety about police abuse.

I am so erased and unidentifiable in the motherland, that the
assumption of the Moroccan nationality should suffice.

I am my white mother's medical degree.

I am my black father's psychiatric nurse specialization.

I am a story of migrants. I am lost in the world. I am bound to
the sea, to the coastal wind, to being five years old, bottom's
of my feet so thick I can run painlessly through rocks.

I am an import economy; Dutch notebooks, Latin American
corn flour, US canned meat.

I am rocky coasts and soft shores. I am yellow and orange
bellied birds. I am Sunday prayers and rosaries. I am a
relentless coastal breeze of relief.

I am poverty, corruption, domestic abuse, patriarchy. I am
cancerous refinery smog. I am a hub for cocaine distribution
across borders. I am capitalist. I am everyday another
bulldozed piece of land. I am not a happy island. I am tired
and exhausted. I want to be free. I want to decolonize. I'm am
never done grieving. I am a fighter. I will speak loudly. I will
always resist.

– Daniella Britt

Multilingual chronicles

I want to share the story of the first time I realized being multilingual was more a skill than something to be ashamed of. I moved to the Netherlands at 18 years old, as many Aruban kids do, for my studies. My Dutch wasn't that great, but I figured I can read and write it well enough so it can't be that much of a struggle, right?



Wrong. From the minute I had to interact with the locals it was apparent that my Dutch, or lack thereof, was an issue. I had a hard time connecting with my classmates and teachers. I'm studying to become a history teacher. And this meant that my Dutch had to be on point. It was a struggle to finish my papers on time and I was constantly reminded by my peers and teachers that the language barrier was an issue. To make things worse, people dismissed me constantly because I couldn't express myself properly in Dutch; I didn't feel like I was on the same level as my classmates.

I started doubting myself. Fast-forward a couple of years. We went on a field trip around Morocco. It was definitely one of the best experiences I've had

so far. It was also on this field trip that I discovered how useful it was to be able to speak four different languages. However, I didn't realize it immediately. While my classmates were complaining about the weather, I was pleasantly surprised that the temperature and weather conditions were similar to Aruba's, which made it one less thing I was worrying about compared to my classmates. I had no problems with the food either because I was already used to a lot of seasoning. But the biggest distinction by far was the fact that I could communicate with the locals. It didn't always happen flawlessly, but with four languages at my disposal it made it a lot easier, especially because in some parts of Morocco they speak Spanish

“I realized something at that moment: growing up in a place where I was exposed to so many different cultures and languages makes it easy for me to make my way around new places and people.”



because of their history with Spanish settlers.

Basically, I could adapt very quickly to my environment, something my classmates had issues with. I realized something at that moment: growing up in a place where I was exposed to so many different cultures and languages makes it easy for me to make my way around new places and people. It isn't a bad thing that my Dutch isn't perfect, I speak three other

wonderful languages. It doesn't make me less intelligent and it certainly doesn't make me less than.

– Sheriann Maduro

Caribbean diaspora conversations

– an interview with Josh Asmah

Photo by Josh



After roaming the busy and hectic city centre of Amsterdam on a Saturday afternoon, we finally find a quiet place in a bookshop for this interview. Two years ago, Josh and I met working in the same café in Amsterdam. Since then our Caribbean friendship has been sparkling. In this interview, Josh shares how he identifies with one language but feels most comfortable in another. Born on Bonaire, he lived there in his early childhood before moving to the United States shortly; he grew up a majority of his life in Ghana with his little brother (Bonairean/Curaçaoan mother, Ghanian father), and he considers himself part of the Caribbean diaspora. Josh is currently living in Amsterdam, the Netherlands while studying in Utrecht.

Growing up in different countries, which language(s) do you speak with your family?

With my mom we always speak Papiamentu and with my father, in English because he wouldn't speak Papiamentu with us himself — he wanted us to speak English already from when we were little. The funny thing now still is that when both my parents are in the same room and we are having a conversation, I would speak back and forth Papiamentu with my mom and English with my father. Both can speak English and Papiamentu but it feels

wrong to speak Papiamentu with him. I almost never speak with him in Papiamentu. With my family on Bonaire I speak Papiamentu and with my family in Ghana I speak English.

In what language(s) do you feel most comfortable to express yourself with?

It depends on where I am. I did not live a long time on Bonaire but almost my whole life I speak Papiamentu with my mother. Once I came here in the Netherlands, I learned more words in Papiamentu, such as "chinga, sinka" — not that my mom or other family members



Photo by Josh

would ever use these words — [we both laugh] — and then a whole other side of Papiamentu opened for me. On one hand, I use English a majority of the time, professionally and at university, but I feel most comfortable expressing myself fluently in English as well.

What was your experience with having Papiamentu — in relation to your personal development — as part of the Caribbean diaspora?

I think of it as interesting because there are different ways that people identify with. Is it language? Is it your country of origin? Is it your nationality in your passport? If I look at these questions, I already have four answers for myself. I identify as speaking most fluently in English, my passport is from the Netherlands, I was born in the Caribbean but I lived most of

my life in Ghana. At the end of the day, I still identify most with Papiamentu or being from Bonaire. Even if I only lived there for a short period of time and went back every few years, while on a day to day basis I speak English. This is sort of what has to keep you together because in Ghana a lot of people calls us white or "obroni"— meaning white in the Twi language spoken in Ghana. Almost everyone speaks English with each other as a common language because Ghana has more than sixty dialects and there are a lot of different tribes. My father speaks both Twi and Fante as well. I think that's what helps why I identify with Papiamentu most because, even though I lived twelve years in Ghana, the majority of the time I am with my family. Especially when you are in a place where you identify as black but the people there

"Papiamentu was something that gave us some sort of extra layer of security and privacy"

are like, "Meh, you are not really black. You are still kind of white, you are in between". They would touch our hair and our skin. Papiamentu was something that gave us some sort of extra layer of security and privacy because no one else could understand Papiamentu.

Everyone was speaking English around us. I would be able to express myself without other people being able to understand me. The thing with language is the place I live, including here in the Netherlands, people already have their ideas about what your culture is supposed to be like and would say stuff like, "Oh, you're so not Caribbean because you don't do this or you don't do that". What does that have to do with anything?

Since Bonaire is re-colonized by the Dutch, how did you become more aware about Papiamentu?

Here in the Netherlands it becomes more important to emphasize in a certain degree who I am or what I identify as.

Especially, because when you are talking to Dutch people and you say you are from Bonaire, they would respond with, "Oh, it's the Netherlands". Uh, no — [we both laugh]. I became prouder when I moved here as opposed to back before living in the US and Ghana —

Because you had to defend yourself here?

— yes. Otherwise you would be lumped into the category of just "Dutch colony". For example, when we went to Mezrab together [ed: Mezrab is a place for storytelling, music, comedy, etc.] and the host asked the audience where they are from. When we said Aruba and Bonaire, we had to explain that these are Caribbean islands. Then there was this Dutch guy that said, "That is basically the Netherlands". Nope. We had to defend ourselves — [we both side-eye each other].

Living in Amsterdam, you rarely hear Papiamentu on the streets. Explain the emotions you get or thoughts you have

**— if there is any — when
hearing the language.**

When I hear Papiamentu on the streets, first thing I think is, "Wait, what?" And then I turn to see who it is. I don't always say something. I just listen. If you do end up saying something, there is some sort of instant comradery. There is this little moment of click. It makes me feel more comfortable.

What advice do you have for others within the Caribbean diaspora that can relate to your story or your experience with the language Papiamentu?

A lot of times when you come in the Netherlands, people feel like disadvantage because they speak four languages – Papiamentu/Papiamento, English, Spanish, and Dutch – but the Dutch is not on the same level as the *kaaskoppen*. Okay, it is not a disadvantage, but more at the advantage of: you know all these languages that other people don't know. I don't like when others try to

erase or stomp on your identity. If you say you are Bonairean or from another Caribbean island, people would say, "Oh, you are Dutch. You can speak Dutch, leave it at that". Yes, you can speak Dutch and understand it but it doesn't mean that that is all we are or that you sweep away every other part of your heritage. There is a quote that says your limits to language or perspective — that maybe there isn't one word that describes who you are or what you identify with. Caribbean, a little Dutch, English. There isn't one word but does it, then it doesn't mean it has to be limited. There is room to decide who you want to be and what you want to be. You can't let other people tell you who you are.

You can follow Josh on Instagram @joshthenormal and on his blog joshthenormal.wordpress.com/

– Ichmarah Kock
Instagram: @clitoria_erekta

Thread



Ik stotter in het Nederlands en
Papiaments maar vrijwel nooit in het
Engels,
Mi no sa dikon, pero mi mes idioma no
ta bon amiga ku mi lengua
Of ta mi lengua mes ku ta asocial,
Eigenlijk e locual ku mi ke bisa ta soms
weet ik niet wat ik moet zeggen
Of hoe ik mezelf moet uiten



De volksmond vult mijn lippen niet, ik ken
niet gezellig meedoen
Mi ta keda hu gana di saka jente y tenta e
yu di korsou nan ku yen dreams di
Ancient Egypt
Kana den kaja di Rotterdam ku tatoo di
ank , broma ku ora bo muri nan lo
basalma ey kurpa di e defuntu



Terwijl je moeder uit Buena Vista komt en
je vader uit Banda Bou
Si berdad abo kome Yu di Korsou ku a
bibna na Korsou henter bo life, semper bo
papia lo ta mes bunita ku dimi, mas
elegant, mas refined,
pero nunca mas real ku di mi si noh
Ami ku mi lengua ta asocial ku



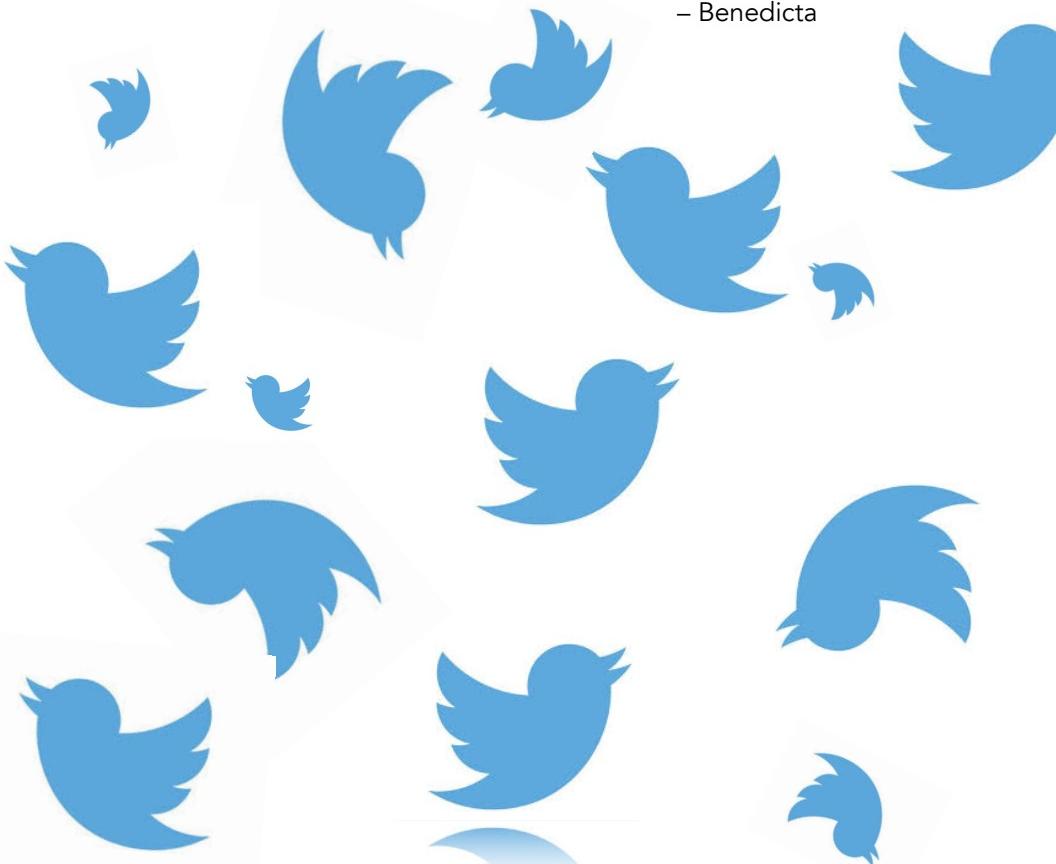
AHUM die laatste zin klopt niet hahaha,
maar > Paso ami, bo sa mi lengua ta
asina asocial, asina asocial ku kasi nunca
e sa sali wa



Pesei Meestal mi keda hari ketu ketu
mind mi business
Pero be carefull, ora e sali mes mes e ta
bin ku bocht skerpi skerpii,,
Real talk
Yu

Tweet your reply

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